

## Tom Hollingsworth

**Brandon:** [00:00:55] All right. I'd like to welcome Tom Hollingsworth to the show.

**Tom:** All right. Thanks, Brandon. I'm pleased to be here. It is a great pleasure to be on your podcast and see you guys again, even if it's virtual.

**Brandon:** Who are you and what do you do?

**Tom:** So my name is Tom Hollingsworth. I am an event lead for Tech Field Day, as well as an analyst at Gestalt IT. My day job is getting people together and, getting influencers from the community, engaged with companies like Forward Networks and many others. We put them together in a room and we do really cool stuff, and then at night I learn about networking and security and wireless, and then I write a lot.

## iPhones and Android

**Brandon:** [00:01:25] Let's jump into a little bit more about you. Let's get to know you with some one-liners. What was the last thing that you changed your mind on?

**Tom:** I changed my mind about wanting to get a new phone. I didn't want to get one because mine's perfectly acceptable, right? And then my wife changed my mind by saying you really need a new phone. So I guess I'm getting a new phone for Christmas!

**Derick:** Which phone is that?

**Tom:** I've been using the 10S which is a great phone, but it's starting to have some hardware issues. So my wife told me I needed to get an iPhone 12. And, if I have permission, of course, I'm going to go get the best phone there is.

**Brandon:** Is it an enterprise purchasing decision - are there multiple people involved in it?

**Tom:** Basically it's my desire and my wife's permission. So I guess that technically counts as two. That makes it an enterprise.

**Brandon:** Moving on to another one-liner... so, what was the last cool thing you came across that's worth sharing with our audience?

**Tom:** So we were actually talking about this a little bit right before we started recording. I don't have cable anymore. And so I've become a voracious consumer of YouTube videos, varying in quality, but one of the series that I found that was really awesome is something called Down the Rabbit Hole.

And he's basically like me. He has the most eclectic type of things that he makes, but he just published a two-hour video about Garry Kasparov, who was probably the greatest chess champion of all time playing against deep blue, who is the AI intelligence chess program that was created that later formed IBM's Watson.

And AI is a hot topic now, but it's interesting to see the progression from deep blue, basically being a set of chips that played chess to learning and thinking and being programmed and I never understood, A how much went into programming, a chess computer and B the fact that chess champions play computers way differently than they play humans.

And that was one of the reasons why Gary Kasparov had such a hard time playing Deep Blue - at first - was because he was playing it like a computer and it was not reacting like one. And so it's a two hour video. So I know that's like a movie, but it's worth it because the way he goes into things and the story that gets told, I had no idea that it was this involved and I highly recommend you should definitely check that out.

**Brandon:** Definitely. Yeah. I saw that searches on Google for chess had been up recently because of the Queen's Gambit on Netflix. Definitely check that out if you get a chance, it's not necessarily what you'd expect and it makes chess really exciting, actually.

What question do you like to be asked?

**Tom:** Funny. I love to be asked questions about learning, where did you go to find this out? Or how did you get so smart? I got that one a lot when I was a kid. How did you get so smart? You must read encyclopedias all the time and I'm like, no. I read normal books, for regular people, but I like teaching people how to learn things.

I feel like a lot of the gap that happens between people who don't understand something and people who are willfully ignorant is just that ability to take a step out and go, I don't know the answer to this, but I'm going to find out. And so by giving them resources and teaching them how to look things up for themselves, you can vastly change the way that a person interacts with their environment and learns things.

Yeah, just a quick thing for me. The pandemic - obviously being locked in my house - is not something I'm completely unfamiliar with, because I work from home all the time, but I needed to do something with my free time. So I went back to some of the skills that I had originally been working on before I got into IT.

And I taught myself how to cook things better. Because sometimes people are like, I don't know how to do this, but I started learning different techniques and looking things up. And in six or seven months I went from, "I think I can make a grilled cheese sandwich" to "I'm going to use bechamel sauce and I've got this different kind of cheese and I'm going to broil it instead of frying it in a pan."

And you get more confident and as you do that, the learning and the experience make you more willing to try new things. So when people ask me, how did you get good at this? I'm like, sit down. I have things to tell you.

**Brandon:** I got to add something there. I feel like cooking is exactly the kind of thing that YouTube is just ideally suited for because anyone with anyone's level of skill can start a series and with video you have a much better sense than any words you have to read through. Also, if someone's talking over what they're showing you can have it running while you're doing that same thing. I'm curious - when you want to learn something, where do you go first? Do

you go to videos on the internet? Do you go to something in text? How do you find how you're going to learn something?

**Tom:** So I tend to bias myself toward texts because I grew up in that generation before video was a thing, and so I like to read through things. I like to get a grasp of the words, and maybe part of it is because I'm a wordsmith by trade - words matter more to me, but I am starting to gain an affinity for concise YouTube videos.

You guys have probably seen the phenomenon where people will post recipes on their blog, but the first eight paragraphs of the recipe is like a, an origin story for their child's favorite teddy bear. No. We're going to go right down to the part where there's an ingredients list. So being concise matters to me.

So if there's like a YouTube video - "I'm going to show you how to make a Cajun jambalaya in five minutes." Right on. I want to see that now I may have to pause it and jot down the recipe, but like you said, seeing the way that it works, how, what color should this be when it's done? How long should I put it in the oven? Those are things that do lend themselves well to video. So I think as people get better at learning how to make those videos, it's becoming more of a multimedia experience. I need the text to be able to reference later, but I do enjoy watching people doing something that they love.

**Brandon:** I feel like the best YouTube videos are done by those who might have a technical writing background, almost - at least appeal to me - where only the words that are necessary are there. And they start with "Here's what you're going to get out of this video, and at the end of however many minutes it is, here's the skill you're going to have.. We actually did something in that style for our podcast in Episode Zero, that I'd encourage everyone to take a listen to - it's exactly three minutes, and it's why you should listen and what you should get out of this and what we're thinking.

**Derick:** I've been cooking a lot as well. I love cooking. What is your favorite thing that you've cooked since the pandemic started?

**Tom:** Ooh, That's a good one. You would have to ask me my favorite, that, cause I'm like now I'm hungry. I don't know. I think maybe my favorite was, I made a butter chicken recipe. I'd say it's a regional Indian dish, which by the way is not a cuisine we get here in the middle of the country.

I live in Oklahoma. We typically deep fry everything. So I wanted to try this out and my family is very, middle-of-the-road when it comes to their tastes. So I'm like, I want to try this. So I made it according to the recipe, smelled good to me, tasted good to me. And I tried it. And you know that thing where you put a dish in front of a child and you just recoil your hand, you're like, oh, please like this.

It was a hit. They loved it! They said it was the best thing they've ever tasted. They asked me to make it at least once every couple of weeks. It's that joy that you feel that "I made something" that other people enjoyed and I got something out of it in the end. I've helped them experience new flavors, new culture, because let's be fair, Kraft macaroni and cheese can only take you so far. You've got to open up your worldview a little bit outside of

chicken-fried steak and hamburgers, and I feel like, if I can get them to do that, the next thing you know, we're going to have a tandoori oven in the back. I'm going to be making naan until I run out of yeast, and it'll be a happy day for me.

**Derick:** If you can find a link to that, we'll put it in the show notes.

**Tom:** I will. absolutely make sure that I send you my recipe for butter chicken, cause it's worth it.

**Brandon:** Seeking truth in kitchen recipes. Okay.

## Milking cows and running networks

**Brandon:** [00:08:40] Moving on. Tom. I think - let's start out with your origin story. Where did you come from, as we move towards Tech Field Day and more modern stuff.

**Tom:** I'm a geeky little farm boy. I have milked a cow, the old fashioned way. I have also programmed a global network. I may be one of the only people that I know that has done both of those things. I grew up on a farm. My parents got me a Commodore 64 when I was a kid. And eventually that begot other computers and they got me enough books to learn how to program them. They were always something that I wanted to work on. I went to college and got a degree in Management Information Systems. I thought I was going to be a database administrator and that was in 2001 and that didn't work out.

So I went up the hard way in the trenches. I started out doing telephone tech support, tier one for Gateway 2000. And then I got a job doing just some basic tech work and that bled into what I consider to be my kind of my first real tech job. Just starting off as a technician, working in schools.

**Derick:** Yeah. So I can identify a little bit with that. I grew up, I was taught how to field dress squirrel and deer and stuff like that. And my dad used to hang deer from a tree and it always felt strange sometimes, being the, one of the only one of the only people, if not the only person in a network shop that has done something like that.

**Tom:** Yeah, we look at the way that technology is growing and changing and even in a dairy industry, it's a very high tech thing. There's a lot of stuff that goes on, even in what I would consider to be a small farm of say, like a hundred cattle. There's a lot of technology. There's a lot of reporting and things like that, And so my uncles who are not the most technically savvy people on the planet know how to operate that technology. And it's funny to talk to them sometimes and they always ask me computer questions because to them, a computer is a laptop, not a network and wireless and stuff like that.

But when you tell them, Oh yeah, we can put an AP in the barn and we can light it all up. "You mean I can use my, my phone in the barn or I can use my laptop out there?" Yeah. Then they get excited and they start asking the right questions to learn how to do that. And so you can see they have the right mindset, just maybe not the right skillset.

## The Story of Technology?

**Brandon:** [00:10:48] Tom. I almost wonder if that's the story of technology in the past decade that it's - we're finding it in places that we didn't find it before - that everything is transforming. So almost a decade ago, Marc Andreessen wrote about Software Is Eating The World - we had him on the show recently - and, in that time, we're seeing ubiquitous computing. We're seeing it in places that it couldn't go before because the power considerations were too stringent. The compute power, just like the amount of processing capabilities just weren't there. Or we didn't have the sensors to interact with it, or - it was too expensive. Any thoughts there?

**Tom:** Yeah, that, that is absolutely the story of learning how computers can make things better. We've seen it in cars for years, right? As someone whose father spent many hours tuning carburetors and cursing at carburetors, and then to drive a modern vehicle that has a fuel injection system, that's completely computer- controlled. It works. It's super- efficient. It does what it needs to do. Yeah. if your car is your hobby and you want to spend hours fine-tuning everything, then by all means - do so. But technology makes it so much easier. And I was digging through a box of stuff that I found in the attic the other day.

And it was from back when I was in college, and back in college, I didn't have a cell phone. That was like a luxury item. And I remember specifically telling my friends, if I don't want to be found, I don't want to be found. I'm never going to carry a phone. And now look at me. I think I'm going to upgrade my phone because I need more RAM and better applications, and it just, the technology has driven the way that we interact with people in a massively different way. I have a smart thermostat in my house. If it's too hot, I turn the air conditioner on from my phone. I can ask my smart speaker to do that. It's a level of convenience.

That belies the fact that 15 years ago, my remote control for the thermostat was making a kid get up to do it.

## Having a "networking is for me" moment

**Derick:** [00:12:32] Let's talk about your transition into networking. Let's start this a different way. I remember the first time I had a major network project outside of just being an admin, where, in the end I had this end-to-end working thing, and I knew what was happening, from the moment the data was injected at one side of the network, it was being spread out on the other. And that was like a huge moment for me. And I was like, I want to build networks for the rest of my life. So did you have a moment like that? And when did you realize that networking was going to be for you?

**Tom:** I got the hint of it when I was a tier-one help desk person, but the transition didn't formally happen until I was in a spot where I could learn the technology. I was a help desk tech for six months - which was the longest six months of my life - because there's only so many times you can reset people's AOL passwords before you lose your mind.

But towards the end of that, so this would be probably 2002 into 2003, I noticed that the number of calls that I was getting for people who were having problems with their dial-up modems was going down. I could rebuild a winsock stack in Windows 98 with my eyes closed, under water, but I wasn't getting that anymore. I was getting people who said "I have

a cable modem and it's going wrong." Technically we didn't work on those, but I felt like I owed it to people to at least ask them where's the problem? So I started doing a little research into networking and they're like, Oh, if you see this address in the IP config on your windows box, it means that the cable modem probably is having an issue.

And so I got to the point where I'd say, okay, here's what you're going to do. You're going to unplug the cable modem for 10 minutes. You can plug it back in. If it's still doing the same thing, call the cable company and tell them that the tech from Gateway told you to say this. And at that point I realized - maybe there's something more to this? Maybe there's a way for me to get better at that part of it. 'Cause it was fascinating to learn how it all worked. And then after I was at my new job, doing school tech work for probably about a year and a half, I had to go fix a Cisco router and the guy who was mentoring me, he walked me through consoling to the router and typing in this command to enter a route so that everything started working.

And when we got done, I was on the phone with him and I said, "I'm going to have to learn how to work on these things, aren't I?", and he was a slow-talking Southern guy. He goes, "Yup. Better find you a book."

## Joining a Community

**Derick:** [00:14:49] So you got into networking and, um, I know you eventually, you got a CCIE and you started blogging. When did you become public?

**Brandon:** What was your IPO?

**Tom:** Yeah. Yeah, what was my social IPO. So it's funny because they're all interrelated a little bit. 2020 is the 10th anniversary of me starting my blog. I'd been on Twitter for a little while. Not long, not long. And I was interacting with some people that I knew from the CCIE study community and things like that.

And I realized at the time 140 characters was just a little too restricting for me. So I started a blog and I started writing things down and people started referencing my blog a little bit or saying, "Hey, this is a great post." Or and in some cases- "Hey, this isn't a great post and you're a horrible human being" and I would fight back.

But then that built to February of 2011, when I got a DM from Stephen Foskett, and said, Hey, I'm doing this thing called Tech Field Day. Would you like to come? And I got so excited. I almost drove my car off the road. I needed to pull over and fill out the form before he changed his mind. But through Tech Field Day and meeting people in the community and then, eventually taking and passing my CCI exam - eventually passing it in, in 2011 after several attempts. It gave me the confidence to say, okay, I guess I know what I'm talking about. And then that made me want to be more social. It made me want to interact with people online. And so when I did that, it all blew up in, at Cisco Live in 2011, where I parked my butt in a chair outside of the registration desk on a Saturday afternoon, and I tweeted out, "Hey, I'm down here. Come find me!"

And, it'll soon be 10 years later, we basically have created this idea that social media is a thing for Cisco and it snowballed from there. For me, it was feeling like I needed to get my thoughts out, seeing that people valued them, feeling the confidence that I did know what I was talking about, and then pushing that back towards the community to help - kind of - foster that relationship with people.

## What is the Tech Field Day Empire?

**Brandon:** [00:16:36] That was definitely one of the early days, and I wanted to learn a little bit more about, how did it grow? How did it expand this Tech Field Day, Gestalt IT, empire, whatever you want to call it, how would you describe it? What is it?

**Tom:** So Gestalt IT is the original part. And for those of you out there who are currently running to the dictionary to figure out - gestalt is a German psychology term. That means the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Get people together in a room and what you get out of it is often better than the little individual pieces that you put in.

As I mentioned, Stephen Foskett, my wonderful and amazing boss, who's hopefully listening to this podcast right now. Hi boss! He had this idea to take people from networking and security and wireless and storage and systems, and bring them together and do a little cross training. So I laugh because at my very first field day event, Tech Field Day 5, I was teaching IPV6 to Curtis Preston, Mr. Backup, and Mr. Backup was teaching me how de-duplication works. And so we were learning from each other at that time. As that started growing and changing and morphing, someone said, what if we - instead of getting a whole bunch of different people together in the room to do a general Technology Field Day - what if we got a bunch of people around one specific topic area?

So Greg Ferro of Packet Pushers podcast was the first person who came up with that idea. That's where Networking Field Day 1 came from, which begot wireless field day and storage field day and mobility field day and Security Field Day. So we've gone from, everybody knows a little bit about everything to everybody there knows a lot about a specific topic, but maybe not everything that there is to know.

And so as that's grown along, we at Field Day have become almost like a reference for people. It's "Hey, there's this really cool video that we recorded about this thing" - and so people will go watch that video. I saw one of our videos was used as a reference in a Wikipedia article as a single source of truth.

And I was like, I feel a little honored by that.

**Derick:** Yeah. I gotta say, Brandon's video about how he gained empathy for the network engineer was one of the reasons why I chose to come to Forward, to be totally honest I was just blown, first of all by the title - I'm like wow somebody actually cares about the network engineer - "That's incredible!" Cause, I got to tell you, that's not really a ubiquitous feeling on the vendor side. An NFD video definitely influenced my decision about where I wanted to work.

## Experiencing Networking Field Day

**Brandon:** [00:18:54] Well, let's talk a little bit more about the Tech Field Day / Networking Field Day experience from both sides. So I've certainly experienced it as a vendor - you've spent weeks preparing because you don't want to waste those people's time. You want them to say good things. You want them to experience the full power of your product. You want them to get your message. You want them to be excited to talk about it. It reflects on you and your company, if you do a great job versus an okay job versus a terrible job.

I'm curious - what is it like on the other side though? What is it like to be at that table with roughly 10 people who are like you, who have a really solid depth of experience in that one subject area who are live-communicating with each other? What does it look like before, after, during?

**Tom:** That's, it's a good question because I've been a delegate at several events. I jumped into that side of it before I became the president of the Hair Club for Men, so to speak. It's humbling in a way. You've always heard the somewhat misnamed adage: if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room.

The very first time I came to Field Day, I realized - I am way not the smartest person in this room, but I can learn from these folks. So you get to meet people, you get to interact with them, you get to get different perspectives. And then when you all sit around that U shaped table, you're all equal.

You're an audience. You get to take what a person says and you get to provide perspective. I remember in my very first presentation, at one of the vendor's presentations, I kind of understood some of it, but then they got to the wireless part. I'm like, wait, I just deployed this. I have a bunch of questions.

And uh, if memory serves, I was a little hard on the guy because I said, wait a minute, I just sold this to somebody. And now you're telling me there's this new thing, and you're not going to support the old thing anymore? What's up with that? And I remember I got a DM on Twitter from one of my coworkers.

He goes, "Wow, you didn't hold back with them!" I'm like, "Ooh, I felt like it needed to be said...", but it was the freedom to do that. It was the freedom to have the right guy in the room at the right time to say, "Hold on, where are you going with this?" And that kind of emboldens people to be able to say my opinion matters.

And to me, that's what the delegates, the biggest takeaway for the delegates, is that they get to say the things that are important to them, to an audience that's receptive to hearing it.

**Brandon:** And even as a vendor, I appreciate that I'm able to get that direct, unfiltered, honest feedback about practical deployment aspects of technology, cause there aren't too many other forums to get that - the "What does it mean for me?" kinds of questions for people who will be affected by the decisions that vendors make.

**Tom:** Now Derick, you and I were actually delegates at a Field Day event together. And I think you have a different perspective coming from your side.

**Derick:** Yeah. I think what I really enjoyed about that, my interface to a lot of vendors when I was on the customer side was - some sales channel. And I'd have questions like, "Hey, how come you did it this way and not that way?" and they're not equipped to answer that question, or they just brush it off or they say, we'll get back to you. Not really a great answer. So I also could not believe when I got extended an invite to that event. I was like, no way! So I was so excited and I just wanted to be able to talk to somebody at the company. And ask those kinds of questions and get real answers because - that's what the event is about.

And ostensibly, hopefully you get a real answer, but it was awesome being in the position to ask those questions, and being surrounded by people who understood what you were asking or at least understood, directionally, what you were trying to get at and being able to feed off that and then ask more questions.

That was it. It was exhilarating to be there and to, to be a part of that.

**Brandon:** So the experience during, I know that every delegate has a laptop. They're seated at a table. They're interacting. What is it like -are they talking about the presenters? Are they sharing their thoughts live, and in real time?

**Tom:** It depends. Obviously as we're recording this, we're still in the middle of a pandemic. So a lot of the interaction we have is at home now, but Field Day is very much an in-person event because you're there you're with people. You get to see where they work. I remember there was one presentation where we walked into their office and, uh, we were doing our little pre-event visit.

And I said, you guys are going to need some tables to set up for our delegates. They go - oh, don't worry, we're going to take care of that. We walked back in like two days later and their office was completely rearranged. And I realized the reason why is because they had pulled all of the employees' desks together to make our tables, and I was like, I am currently sitting at the CEO's desk, at least what would be the CEO's desk when he's not here or when we're not here. And I thought that was funny, but you only get that if you're in-person. So when they're there, like, you know, people are taking notes, they're trying to understand the technology or the applications for it.

Sometimes they're tweeting out, Hey, I really thought that this was a cool thing. Or, watch Brandon blow the dust off this binder. That to me was one of the coolest things just because it was the perfect amount of theatricality.

**Brandon:** That wasn't me. That was Behram - But to be fair our names are very similar. Yeah that was an awesome thing. We'll have to link to the video of Behram Mistree blowing the dust off the cover as part of a pretty entertaining Field Day video.

**Tom:** Yeah. And then, sometimes people are like, okay, so I want to ask this question, but I don't know if it's appropriate because we do have a little bit of communication on the backside. And the funny thing is when someone says that and four people immediately

respond and go, "No, that's a good question, you need to ask that!" - it's that reinforcement that you get from your peers going, dude, that was inspired!"

## Embracing Failure, and Why You Need a Backup Plan

**Brandon:** [00:24:14] Let's talk a little bit about the times it doesn't go so well. I would be fascinated to learn how bad it can go.

**Tom:** Yeah.

**Brandon:** We don't need to throw anyone under the bus.

**Tom:** Y'know you're right. You're right. I unfortunately.

**Brandon:** We can talk about how bad it can go and indulge in the failures for a second.

**Tom:** So it's I am one of those people that always has a backup plan for everything. When I go camping, I bring two sets of everything if I can carry it, because you never know when you're going to lose the first one or

**Brandon:** Network engineer adds redundancy where it's

**Tom:** Yeah, exactly.

**Brandon:** Fault tolerance, proper fault tolerance.

**Tom:** Yeah, it means I carry 25 extra pounds of gear into the field, but you know what, if I need it, I've got it. So when we do a lot of coaching upfront for companies who are participating, one of the things we always talk about is, are you going to do a demo? And they're like, we're thinking about it. I said, good. Let me tell you. We have a gremlin. He hangs out and he occasionally shows up to crash your demo.

And I promise you when he does it, it will be in a way you've never seen before. And you need to have a backup plan for that. You need to have a recording, narrate through slides, or something like that, but just have a plan. You may not need it, but you're going to want it if it happens and part of the reason why, and we found this out early on - engineers don't like to see people fail. They want to get up and fix things, but sometimes you can't do that. At Tech Field Day when they're at the table, they're wired microphone cables. So they can't jump up and run up to help. But the way that they sometimes try to help is they want to toss a softball to somebody while they're talking. So like, you're furiously trying to fix this demo cause you can't figure out why you can't contact Amazon, for example, And someone will say, so how do you see this working in the field going forward? Cause they're thinking, Oh, that's a great softball. I can help them out and give them, buy them some time.

And now the person's like sweating, like they're typing and webbing. And then they're like, Oh, I've got to answer this question. It's better if your demo completely fails, like - smoke and gremlins running around and screeching and running out of the room, because if you've failed, we can recover from a failure.

We just cut that little part out of the video and we're like, "Hey, this was the plan all along!" brownouts are the worst, because it's kind of working, and you think, well, if I just change this setting, it'll work. And it doesn't. And then you change another setting and that doesn't work either.

Derick you've been through the CCIE lab. This is that moment, right after lunch, when everything fell apart and you're like, "I can fix this !" ...and two hours later, you're wanting to gouge your own eyeballs out, cause you're like, I don't understand why this isn't working, because you think that you can recover from this when in fact what you mean for it to happen is just everything fall apart.

**Derick:** I've had some good NFD presentations and I've had a couple that were not great. And, I had one where the demo technically worked, the demo actually worked, but because the projector we were using was 800 by 600, nothing on the screen looked okay. Not even the slides we made, looked good. All the visual elements of the story were utterly broken - the app, the CSS was all wonky, the text became unreadable and the demo worked, but no, it was, how do you tell a story like that?

So that one was, probably I was sweating at the end of that one cause I didn't know what to do. What do you even say at that point? And that was really, I don't think that was really anyone's fault. I think it was a backup projector I think is what ended up happening. Oh man. So what I learned from that lesson is, bring your own projector - just in case, and, that's what I do now. If I'm going to present, there's going to be a working projector with the right resolution when I walk in there, one way or the other.

**Brandon:** I got a story to add about that one. So I remember grad school with some of the early days of OpenFlow and SDN, we'd give demos to luminaries who just happened to be coming by. And I remember thinking how many backups we need to have ready when Vint Cerf came by, because it's of all the people you want to show this thing that you've put your blood, sweat, and tears into when you want it to actually work the one day that they're there. And Derick and I actually did a presentation, was it last Friday? And we assumed that aliens would have abducted multiple Amazon data centers, that one of our two laptops was going to spontaneously combust and that a backhoe would hit the fibers near both of our houses at the same time and we'd still be okay because we had backups of backups. We had LTE, we also had recordings and this was on Friday, the 13th of 2020. So we thought of all the days for things to go wrong, it was probably going to be this one, but fortunately it didn't go too bad. It actually worked pretty well.

**Tom:** Yeah, I will say that a lot of my perspective on this comes from being somewhat pessimistic, just because I've seen things go wrong. If I have two backup plans and I don't need them then great. I didn't need them, but you're good. If you don't have a backup plan, you're really gonna want to have one at it.

I will say to Derick's point, sometimes, everything can go right in the presentation. And then there's a technical glitch that causes a problem. We ran into one that we didn't even know. It was a problem. We were trying to do a live streaming event in Spain, and we were going to use a camera that we had wanted to use, and we tried it out at the office and everything

looked beautiful and it was great. And we get onsite and we go to connect the camera to the wireless network and it doesn't work. And we're like, crap, what are we going to do? So we quickly rearrange our ideas. I think one of us ended up streaming off of our cell phone for a little bit because the guy who works with me, mr.

Ben Gage, in addition to being an amazing musician, is one of the best when it comes to now, we need a new plan. So I remember I had to go find a SIM card to put into an iPad, to be able to stream off of it. And then like, you know, in between this, I've got like people from the wireless team coming over to ask me questions about what's going on.

Hey, we've never seen one of these before. "Boy, that's weird that shouldn't have happened." And ultimately what we determined is the camera wouldn't work on their wireless network because of some frame that it sent that triggered like the isolation response. And so it was a lot of "Boy we're going to learn a lot from this when it's over!"

The problem is we needed the camera to work before it was over. And so we ended up with a backup plan that worked, but that was a fail on our part because you know, we're away from our, our base where we know how things work. We don't know how to make all this go on. So after that, like we had an immediate plan of, okay, if this happens again, here's how we're gonna fix it.

And so it's great because then at that point you have that comfortability to say, "This is how we need to proceed in the future." And I promise you if you're listening to this and you're a network engineer or a systems engineer, or someone like that, your DR plan does not need to be, if things go wrong, we'll fix them.

Your DR Plan needs to be, if things go wrong, we will fix them in this order. And this person's responsible for that. And if that person's out with the flu, then this person's going to take care of it. And here's who we're going to call. You need to be as specific as possible, because if you're not, if there's anything open for debate, that will be the part that fails.

**Brandon:** Do you actively test your backup plans?

**Tom:** Oh yeah. Yeah. I, in fact, there are times when I just run my backup plan for the heck of it, to see if it's going to work. And if it doesn't go well, then you've got a problem. Oh, I wonder what happens if I turn the LTE on here and try to stream over it. Holy crap. That looks bad. Let's go figure out why that failed.

Or, "Hey, I wonder what would happen if we tried to copy all of the files from this drive that drive in case this drive goes out?" well, this drive won't hold all those files. I wonder why. So it's a constant process of making sure that everything works because if your backup plan isn't reliable, it's not a backup plan.

**Brandon:** This brings to mind how to do benchmarking well - that even if a vendor shows you a data sheet that says, here's how well we perform the only true benchmark that matters is your data on your system with your clicks. And the analogy here is the best end-to-end practice for any demo is your data, your system, your clicks, the same exact system you're

using to present in the same exact way. And then you have that confidence going on that's probably going to work.

## Free Pen Testing

**Tom:** [00:31:42] It actually brings up a funny point. We were at an event, I believe it was last year. We were doing a demo. And the company was presenting. They were actually really cool about it. They're like, we want to present this more as a challenge, almost like a hackathon. We want you to try to break through this security protection on this switch.

We don't think you can do it. And of course, one of the delegates, his eyes lit up and he goes, I can do this. So he recruited friends of his in a Slack channel and using zero tier he had, all of them wrote into his laptop. And like, there were 15 people hacking on this thing at once now in the time limit that they gave him, he wasn't able to get it, but they thought they figured out how to break this protocol.

And it was great because the guy who was doing the presentation on the protocol was kind of shoulder surfing a little bit. And when he saw where they were going, he went. Oh crap. And so then they realized with enough time that is a legitimate way to cause this to break. So they were able to go in and eventually I think they were either able to patch it or at least create a protection that would prevent it from happening.

But it's the, it's that kind of thing where it's like, wow, you get the right number of brains working on this problem and, and working on things - you can do amazing things with it in an unintended way.

**Brandon:** That Sounds like a genius move to me to get free penetration testing. I love it.

## Getting the Temp Right

**Derick:** [00:33:12] Before we, we move on from this topic. I just want to add something. I hope this doesn't sound too lame. I think one of the things that's really that I learned too, that's really important when you're presenting, is the comfort of the people in the room. And I'm speaking specifically of technical, TFD.

I have, I had a couple presentations where we were in a hotel conference room with no temperature controls and it got to be crazy sweating hot, and there was no water in the room and it was like, "That's never going to happen again." Like I, now you have to have the right, somewhere in the 68 to 72 range and there's gotta be water and coffee available for the people in the room or, you might as well be talking at a wall because people, when they're, when they get sweaty and uncomfortable, they're not really listening. They don't really engage. that's another one that, it doesn't matter how great your demo was, a whole great your story is - you're going to override that if people are uncomfortable.

**Tom:** Yeah, we ran into a situation one time where it was the same kind of thing. We were in a conference room. Things were a little warmer than they should have been. And that was watching the cascade failure of a backup plan. Oh, we just need to turn the thermostat down in the room. We can't because the HVAC systems locked out. It's centrally controlled by a building management company. Oh, we'll call our contact. Oh, it's after five that contact doesn't answer his phone. we'll call the backup help desk. That's automated. Which building are you in? And so it just kept getting worse and worse. So me - I'm scrambling around trying to fix it. Cause that's my job. And I look inside and people are like doing this and they're doing this.

And you can tell they're not really focused on the presentation and it's like, you guys gotta get this together. Now. Of course I was like, Who would have thought that the thermostats were all centrally controlled by a person who went home at 5:02? And then after that I was like, okay, so you guys have a post-mortem for this now - this won't happen again? And they're like, "Yeah. Yeah. We fixed it."

## Staying Sane after Thousands of Presentations

**Derick:** [00:34:45] Let's zoom out a little, because this is the part I've been really looking forward to. You've sat through how many presentations do you think?

**Tom:** hundreds at this point easily. We average about 8 to 10 per event. And I've been doing events for seven years as an employee. 10 years as a delegate. It's got to be North of 500 at this point.

That you've done personally Yeah.

**Derick:** How have you not, have you ever gone numb because you've now sat through a million PowerPoint presentations, lost your mind?

**Tom:** I've gotten really good at pointing out when people have problems with their PowerPoints, and it's great because a lot of times I have to teach students or kids how to use PowerPoint effectively. And the first thing I tell them is, like animations suck, you don't need music, get to the point.

Don't make them eye charts. Yeah, it's very easy to use the tool incorrectly. Yes. I can use a screwdriver as a chisel if I have to. It's not the best use of either of those tools. So you have to find a way to focus on what's important and people who are good at conveying messages don't rely on PowerPoint.

That's like their backup plan, or here's what I want to tell you that's exciting. When - and I'll use Forward Networks as a perfectly good example - because you guys have always done a great job of saying the PowerPoint's here for window dressing, because you don't really care about that.

Here's what you care about. Here's the demo. Here's where we poke around and show you the power of the platform. You guys realize that the best way to get that across is to talk

about what you're doing and show that because it sends that light bulb moment off. Hey, I remember when I was in this exact same scenario, why didn't I have a tool like this?

Going all the way back to the early days of Field Day, there was a presenter for the very first time who stood up and said, I don't have any slides. I'm going to whiteboard this whole thing out. And the guy did a great job, drawing everything out and showing how it works and told a very great story on the whiteboard.

And then that caused people to say, "Oh, I need to whiteboard everything because slides are stupid." They're not, if you need slides to keep yourself on track, to tell the story right. Use them, but don't abuse them. How many times when we walked into a place, it's okay, we have 150 slides to cover.

What? No, no. Think of it like, uh, being a butcher you got to know where to cut. If I cut this in the wrong spot, that porterhouse is now a very expensive sirloin. Why? That's the joy of being a butcher? What can I cut out? What can I consolidate? I gave a talk overseas one time and I walked in thinking it was a 45-minute discussion.

And when I sat down and they were like, no, it's 20. And I found that out an hour before I was supposed to go on. So I fired up the chainsaw and I completely rearranged my presentation in about an hour. Was it the best presentation I could have given? No, but it's the best presentation I could have given with an hour's notice.

And so sometimes you've got to learn how to make the tool work for you instead of leaning on the tool to do the work for you.

**Brandon:** And you mentioned something I want to riff on there - if there are no slides, then where are people going to focus their attention? It's on you. If there are slides, where are they going to focus their attention? On the slides. And if you're trying to create an emotional connection in the presentation, if you're trying to drive it along and show the excitement that you have, if someone can't see that your eyes are lighting up and that your hands are wildly gesticulating and you're getting to something you actually care about, and you want them to see that - then, just seeing the screen actually gets in the way. And there are actually some ways you can bridge the gap, something as basic as a blank slide, disarms the audience, they go, what's going on? Why is this slide blank? What are we waiting for? Something exciting must be coming. And then they look at you and they listen to you.

**Tom:** Exactly. I can't say it enough that back when Steve Jobs was alive, he was a really good person at doing this. This is, let's be fair. If you've read his autobiography, if you've ever had any kind of interaction with Apple, Steve Jobs has enough personality for five people. So he was obviously going to be the focal point, but he still needed to talk about certain things.

So think back, I think it was to the iPhone launch originally he had slides, but how did he prove that he built a phone? He walked out in front of the slide, pulled it up and called in a coffee order. Everybody was focused on Steve when that happened. Didn't diminish the fact that he was still talking about the phone and all of its features - which is the best way to convey that's through a slide - but sometimes you have to step out and do that. You have to show people how engaged and involved you are, which by the way, for the record, the fact

that was not a canned phone call to someone in the back was awesome. That's the other thing that drives me nuts about demos when they're so overproduced, and so, so scripted that there's not a chance for fun and you can have a little bit of fun with it sometimes, calling in a coffee order for 6,000 people.

## When a vendor is full of it...

**Derick:** [00:39:25] Having seen all those presentations, you have to have some kind of radar now for when a vendor is full of it. So what are some signs? You don't have to name names, but what are some signs or signals that ping your radar?

**Tom:** So it's funny because yeah, you're right. Having seen a lot of presentations and honestly my other job for Gestalt IT as an analyst, I tend to start listening to things. People who are seriously engaged in a product and understand what it's capable of, have an answer for most of your questions. Maybe not the most in-depth answer, but for people who start punting, we can take that offline or that's really fascinating, they tend to miss that. Or, it's the old spelling bee trick. Can you repeat that? Can you please use that in a sentence? Can I please have the country of origin?

Nobody cares. You're stalling because you're trying to figure out the answer. The other thing is that when people are hesitant to get down into the weeds, that's one of the things that we going back to the Field Day delegates, I always warn people. I'm like, they're going to ask you, why did you pick this protocol? Why is it proprietary instead of open source? Why didn't you leverage this kind of stuff? If you can't answer those questions, honestly, and legitimately without throwing somebody under the bus or, trying to make it sound like you are the only startup in Silicon Valley staffed by geniuses, you're going to have a rough time because while press people tend to treat that with kid gloves, non-press analysts don't and I always joke, we, we have a reputation at Field Day. Somebody once said that we're kind of like Shark Tank. And I watched Shark Tank once and turned it off.

And my wife was sitting on the couch. She goes, that was really good. I was like, honey, that's real life for me, like I get to see people trying to pitch and fail because there are a lot of people who just walk in the room and they're mad. Like - you are wasting my time. I could be eating Burger King right now, and I can't, I'm going to savage you. That's not how we are. But if we get the feeling that somebody doesn't know what they're talking about, why would I use your technology over somebody else's? Because we're awesome? Try again. Let me ask you a whole bunch of really deep pointed questions to see how you do it, because we've all seen this in technology.

There are some people who can roll with those punches. There are some people who are so proud of themselves, that anything that you do to talk to them about why their baby might not be the prettiest one in the nursery. They're going to fire back and they're not going to fire back with good arguments.

**Brandon:** What comes to mind for me here is that the hard questions which you tend to get in a Tech Field Day scenario, they force people to be vulnerable, and we're not used to that level of personal or professional exposure, right? On a daily basis, how often does someone

experience a Shark Tank-like environment? But the benefit - what's great for the audience and what I think makes it a compelling format - is that you can separate what's real from what's slideware very quickly, and the delegates can smell blood and you can see when they're smelling blood. And that's when it gets fun for the audience sometimes. Not for the presenter necessarily, but for the audience.

**Tom:** Yeah, I've seen that happen quite a few times. One company had one of their executives stand up and start doing like a little 10 minute speech. And you could just tell it was, I don't even know that he was really talking to the people in the room necessarily.

He might've been talking to the people on video and one of the delegates interrupted him halfway through and said, "so I got a question about the way you handle X." And, Mike Tyson has a really great quote from back in the day. He said, everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. I watched an executive verbally get punched in the mouth because the look on his face was essentially, you're not supposed to talk to me. Nobody talks to me right now. And somebody had to dive in to save him. And it's like, I think I can take this from here, props to that person for thinking on their feet, because this person got out of their comfort zone. Brandon it's just, like you said, you can very quickly figure out the kinds of people who know what they're talking about.

You can very quickly figure out, okay, I think this person is someone that I can ask the hard questions to, because I have to warn the delegates all the time. I'm like, all right, listen, the CEO is going to get up here and he's going to do 15 minutes at the very beginning. Don't ask him anything hard. It's not that I don't love the person with all of my heart. They didn't work on the thing. Go wait for the engineers to come up. Now, sometimes we get really lucky and the CEO/CTO is the person who founded the technology. And so when they start talking, like, yeah, when I built this, I was coding things at night and I was drinking Mountain Dew Code Red, and I'm like, that's my person. We can talk.

**Brandon:** That's the person you want to go have a beer with in the, after party, after which - that has to be a lot of fun too. It's all these people in one place you've had this intense experience that's shared, you've built up all this trust and then you get that release.

**Tom:** Yeah. Yeah. It's you get the opportunity to treat people like they're people and kind of go back to what we said, where Derick had mentioned - you get to meet people that can answer your questions and do things. You get to talk to people as people, because I don't know what it is about corporate culture in America, or if it's just Silicon Valley culture, but we put these people on pedestals, maybe not the right word, but "Oh, he is the CEO and founder of this technology, or she's the person who invented this thing."

My own personal story about this is meeting Terry Slattery for the first time.

For those of you who may not know listening to the podcast, Terry Slattery is the first person to take and pass the CCIE lab. So he's number 1026. I didn't know who Terry was and he was sitting at a table with me. He had walked up, he put his stuff down and he goes, Hey, can I sit here for a few minutes?

I said, yeah, sure. And somebody came running into the room. We ran and said, Hey, I hear there's somebody in here with a lower CCIE number than me. And I looked down at his badge and it said 1026 And I, at the time it didn't register. And to see people treat Terry like he's royalty. I appreciate that.

But to me, he's Terry, we talk about boats. We talk about fishing in Chesapeake Bay because Terry is a person to me, just like when you meet a CEO for the first time, you're like, " Oh, he's such an important person, blah, blah, blah." And then you realize he has the same hobbies that you do, or maybe she is a scout leader like you and you have commonality that you can now see this someone as a person. And now it's a little bit more real to you.

## Presenting Like a Boss

**Brandon:** [00:45:39] Great. And so continuing in this direction of what makes vendor communications effective. I want to talk a little bit about what makes a session memorable. What are the things that presenters can do to make their message pop and to make that experience really stick out in your mind?

**Tom:** Oh, wow, so just for those who are watching, if you want to go to [youtube.com/techfieldday](https://youtube.com/techfieldday) we actually have a playlist called Best of Tech Field Day. It has some absolute gems on there. If you guys are, if you guys are in the systems area, you know, Nutanix. Seeing Dheeraj Pandey in a suit for the very first time was mind blowing to me because it's not the Dheeraj that we know today.

But there's a lot of great presentations on there that include various elements, making it visual. Some of our greatest presentations are whiteboarded, so that's the ability to take what people are saying and draw it out so that it looks like what they have in their mind. And then explain how your solution works against that to make it work better.

Because that way you're meeting people on their own terms, they're using their terminology. Oftentimes you get folks who are locked in a cave who built a UI with no labels going well, if you just knew how to use this, it would be great, but that's not a usability test because usability testing is when a teacher calls you and goes, this is the wrong icon.

You need to fix this. I'm like, oh yeah, people work things differently. The other thing is, is being able to explain technical topics in a way that people grasp, One of the ones that was like a first ballot, Best of Tech Field Day, reaching back to you, Brandon, is Nick McKeown teaching people how building an ASIC is hard, it turns out it really is. And so then Nick is like a college professor teaching experts in the field, how to do things. And like I'm sitting in the back furiously scribbling notes because I'm like, People pay thousands of dollars to get to hear this guy at Stanford. And I got him for free. And so like, it was great because he understood immediately, He was not talking to super, super like industry-insider folks. He was teaching students and to see that kind of change in him was amazing because he's like, I'm going to show you how to do things I am really good at doing. So put the right people in front of the right folks.

Everybody has a marketing department, whether you realize it or not. Marketing is really great at doing a lot of very important things for a company, but there are times when the best solution to the problem is the person who has the least marketing training possible. One time, I asked a friend of mine, if I could talk to somebody who was responsible for working on a specific system.

And her response to me was, I don't know if I should let you talk to them or not, because he's not a media trained. He's going to tell you the truth. And I'm like, that's the person that I want.

**Brandon:** Nice.

So actually Nick was my advisor at Stanford and there are some people who just really pull you in. So Nick, Nick gets all the basics very quickly, He gets the sense of audience, of message, of flow in every presentation. But then he does the next level stuff, which is a delivery that really sucks you in. Things like varying the volume of his voice, of adjusting the speed, of giving a pause, of all the little things that encourage you to pay attention when it matters. So that at the end, you remember the message he was trying to deliver. And then however many years later, like you're doing right now, you're able to remember what he was talking about and what you learned from it and what you experienced in that moment.

**Tom:** And that's actually a good point, Brandon, and I'm going to throw this out here for anybody who is nervous about speaking or who feels that they need to tune things up a little bit, go find your local Toastmasters, because they will teach you these things. I am actually, I'm a member of the boy Scouts of America, and I'm a merit badge counselor for public speaking.

You want to try to teach a 13 year old how to give a public speech when they're nervous and looking at the floor. You need to help them you need to encourage them, but more importantly, you need to teach them why certain things are important. Like you said, pausing to hammer point home, pointing at people, engaging people, letting things stew for a second, because, call it what you will, but it seems to be the most detrimental thing that we've seen in years is this idea of elevator-pitching everything.

I'm going to take 35 minutes of presentation and cram it into five minutes and I'm gonna talk super fast because you really need to get this. And if you don't get this and you walk out of here, I'm not going to get my funding. And if I don't get my funding, I have to go back.

Stop. Learn how to deliver a message and let people think, let people react, let people understand. If you can do that, you will find that you become a significantly more effective speaker without having changed your message at all.

**Brandon:** Good tips. Good tips. I feel like we could do an entire show on what makes a presentation effective and then practical tips.

**Derick:** Particularly when presenting to engineers, I think there's, it's like a whole specialty by itself. There's something about presenting to engineers that's, I really enjoy it, but it's, there's unique challenges versus just generic public speaking.

**Tom:** And the problem that we run into is a lot of people who are trained to speak are either trying to speak to a whole audience of like a hundred people where you don't get a lot of interaction or worse. you're speaking to a disinterested audience. I'm just going to go out on a limb here. A lot of people who are in the executive branch of a company don't care.

Um, I'm sorry. it's, It's the truth of the matter. They have very little time to hear things and, uh, there's a great Dilbert cartoon. If you've ever seen it where it's like, okay, I understood your presentation, but you have to dumb it down for my VP. Okay. That was a great presentation, but you have to dumb it down for the CEO. And the last panel is Dilbert pointing out a smiley face going, as you can see, this is good. It's not that you have to dumb it down. You have to find a way to get their attention and sometimes getting their attention is not diving into minutia about Protocol Wars. Nobody cares about why we should be using IS-IS over OSPF Or why rip is bad. What you need to say is if we do this, we will make more money. We will reduce costs. Why? Because that's the language that the executive speaks in now when they approve the message. And I go talk to Derick about it. I'm like Derick doesn't care how much it costs. All right, cool. So we're going to go ahead and we're going to use IS-IS here because we can modify the TLDs and we don't have to worry about all this other stuff, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Now we can get into the weeds about it and we can talk on each other's level. Good presenters know when each one is appropriate because a lot of people who, and sorry about this, but a lot of people who are in marketing are really used to talking to executives. And when they get in front of the people who don't care about that, the messaging gets lost quickly.

**Brandon:** So then who tends to do the presentations on tech field day events? Do you find that it's sometimes marketers, sometimes engineers, sometimes product managers, sometimes CEOs, CTOs, or other execs.

**Tom:** It's all of the above, but we usually warn people. I find someone who's excitable and who is invested in the product. Someone who knows how to talk to a varied group of audiences. Yes. We have CEOs and CTOs that present. We also have product engineers, product owners, product managers, because then they know the product the best.

Here's why we built it. This is why we think that this is important. I would've never guessed that having a system to normalize data in a database would be so important until Derick taught me that you can store a MAC address in seven different formats from all these different platforms. And I'm sitting here in the audience going, "Holy crap - yeah. I can see where that could be a nightmare for an automation engine."

**Derick:** Thanks. That makes me feel better about that presentation.

I think one of the things that people gotta do when they present, particularly at something like NFD - if you're going to do a demo or whatever, you have to speak the language and to the experience of your audience. And you got to have a punchline, right? If you don't have a punchline to your story, if you're just walking through a list, I dunno, it's not very exciting.

One that pops out as memorable is one that ends with some kind of punchline or some kind of Aha or light-bulb.

**Tom:** Yeah. Actually there was, there's a good example of this, a company named Aparento, that I've been following for a very long time. They were acquired by Palo Alto Networks, like, I think it was earlier this year or late last year, they were showing off how they could do API security for Kubernetes deployments or Docker deployments.

Okay. No big deal. but like a week before that there was a huge vulnerability that came out in Docker and Kubernetes that allowed people to basically just do arbitrary code execution through a malformed API request. Okay. Show stopping bug So Demetrius Delatus who was doing the presentation gets up and he goes through this and he goes here's how we do this Here's how we do this housing renews Oh, by the way. We're going to give away the solution to that specific problem for free on our website. Right now, if you want to go download it and try it out to see if this works for you, but if it doesn't, you can still keep this for free and block this exploit. And like, I think that the noise of a thousand keyboards typing in the URL on that presentation slide was wonderful because - real solution, try it out, no pressure. That's one of the best key takeaways, because it gives people a chance to prove, Hey, this works, I want to try this.

## The Vendor-Customer Tango

**Brandon:** [00:54:34] So we're going to have to wrap up soon, but there are a few other questions I wanted to get back to. So one is flipping the script and we've talked a lot about the vendor experience and what vendors can do to make their communications more compelling. Let's talk about more of what users can do to make their demands or make their desires more clear to the other side.

And this is a question I wanted to ask you and Derick. How do you make your desires known effectively?

**Tom:** So I actually, I just wrote a blog post about this, I get people on? Who asked me for mentoring help. There are two different kinds of people who do this. There are people who ask general questions. What do I need to know? That's not very effective. If you're a user, things are slow. I used to have a whole speech about this, that I used to throw out to some of my friends. It sounded a whole lot like Ace Ventura when he was recounting exactly what happened at the crime and it involved a lot of not breathing. But basically there are 700 things in my head for it's slow. I need to know when it's slow. I need to be very specific about it. So like when I call tech support, they love me.

Because I'm like, okay, I'm having problems reaching this website. And when I do a traceroute, I'm seeing a routing loop over here and they're like, Oh, okay. We'll check that out. Not YouTube is slow. So you need to be very specific about things. If you want to know a question, think through your question. A lot of people have a bad tendency, especially nowadays to interrupt the question that isn't fully formed in their head.

And they'll start asking the question. And as they're asking the question, they're thinking about what they want to ask and pretty soon it's a two-minute question that isn't a question. Write it down, take notes. Okay. Really want to know about that protocol? I really want to know about this. Okay. Now I got it. Now I'm going to ask.

Be specific. Be direct because you want to make sure that you communicate as much information as possible so that they spend the least amount of time thinking, and the most amount of time answering.

**Brandon:** Every hop is expensive. You want to get all the information that, you know, in that form, to the best of your knowledge, and you're not going to know everything. That's the point. You're asking for help, but you're at least communicating everything, to speed up the response.

**Tom:** Exactly. And for the small portion of the population that's listening to this that does the following thing. Please stop. Hi. I would like to explain my opinion on what you just talked about and at the end of it, I would like to ask you what your thoughts are on my opinion. That's not a question. You're showing off. Please stop that.

**Brandon:** To smack you across the internet for that one - sort of thing.

**Derick:** Yeah. I think a lot of users don't understand. The one thing they have to think about when they're interacting with a vendor is that there's product managers and other folks on the vendor side, who've been doing this their whole life, on that side. And they're not familiar with customer enterprise technical culture, or what your workflows are like.

They don't understand all of the challenges, not just technical, but organizational, and funding, and personality challenges. And there's this whole mass of, of moving parts on the customer side, that people on the vendor side don't always grok or understand. And sometimes that results in this sort of animosity, maybe that's too strong of a word, really just a lack of understanding. So when you're trying to explain a problem or trying to interact with the vendor, like just be aware that they may not know, where you're coming from, actually with your problem and that you have to, you might have to explain it. You might have to help them understand.

**Tom:** I will tell you that I have friends in the industry who are social-facing, who are marketing-type-facing people who take a lot of heat for decisions. They have no control over and it frustrates me because they're, they're the face of the company. I get that's your job, but don't yell at them because this product doesn't support this latest revision of a driver.

I promise you as smart as that person is, they don't write drivers. So be respectful, be understanding and be willing to say, this bothers me. Who do I need to talk to about it? Because what you're doing is you're basically saying I have all of this problem that I need to deal with, but I know you're not the right person to deal with it for whatever reason can you send me to where I need to be?

You make more friends that way and you maybe think through the things enough that you're not just the, the guy with the, like the angry face, like hammering away at the keyboard - that

doesn't fix the problem. And the person who's yelling you're yelling at is either going to be really upset that they're getting yelled at for something they had no control over, or they're going to be like, ha too bad sucker and delete your email.

**Derick:** But it feels good to pound on your keyboard.

**Tom:** Yeah, if got one of those old model Ms. Some of the new ones, I feel like if I start pounding on it too hard, I'm just going to punch a hole through my desk.

## How to Influence the Influencers

**Brandon:** [00:58:06] OK, so Tom, one concrete question that I wanted to ask you, let's put this knowledge and these lessons to a specific application as you know, we have a podcast and we'd like to get it to our audience as effectively as possible. What would you suggest we do to get our message, which we're proud of - and we'd love to have more people hear it - out to more people quickly,

**Tom:** I'm not going to suggest making a TikTok account because my kids would kill me if I suggested that, no the best thing about this is to continue to make great content that people can listen to. I listen to a lot of my podcasts when I'm Walking every morning. So it's I go out, I walk, I run, I catch up on stuff that's going on in technology. but make things that people want to refer.

And how many times have we seen that? My friend told me to listen to this. I should totally check this thing out. That's a good way to create that organic kind of advertising. Honestly. It's what we do at Field Day. You don't hear Field Day ads on podcasts. You don't see Field Day banner ads everywhere.

if we're what you want to watch, you're probably already following myself or Steven or one of our other channels on social media. So we advertise almost primarily through there because we want the kind of engagement that comes from people going, "This is something that I'm interested in."

Obviously you guys have done a great job so far because you've had a lot of really big names and a lot of really great conversations. And then for some reason you invited me. I kid, those are the kinds of things that get people attached and engaged, and that will continue to grow over time.

No podcast starts out with 8,000 listeners. Most podcasts start out with eight and grow from there. And as long as you can make it past episode 10 on a podcast, the rest of it's gravy, because you've already gotten past the hard part.

**Brandon:** I think on that note, this episode will hopefully get us to that next order of magnitude. And I definitely appreciate it. And what I like to do sometimes with guests is play back what I learned from them in the course of the conversation. You showed a new way to engage vendors and users of technology with Tech Field Day and how it's grown and evolved over 10 years, and that what makes it really unique and effective is the authenticity of the conversation, and I took notes on a few things you suggested to make your communications

more effective. One is to get their attention. Another is to make it visual. Another is to use their terminology. Deliver it compellingly, make it authentic and organic, make it share-worthy, and simplify the message.

And that's just a partial list of some of the things we covered today.

Tom, I want to thank you again for joining us and sharing all those insights.

**Tom:** I want to thank you for inviting me. It's always great to engage with folks in the community and, and, uh, share some of the things that I learned.

**Brandon:** So Tom, whose story would you like to hear next on this podcast?

**Tom:** There are so many people out there. the home run would be Vint Cerf, if you guys could grab him and be a part of that, cause I think that man has forgotten more about networking than most of us will ever learn. along the same lines, maybe someone like Terry Slattery who was there at the very beginning of a lot of this stuff and has seen it grow, but has also seen how it's cyclical.

**Derick:** Thank you Tom for coming out. It's great. It's always great talking to you. I think I'm going to go join a Toastmasters now, now that you've, you've mentioned that I'm sure there's something I could learn.

**Tom:** And that's the other thing, too, for those of you out here who are like, I don't need to do that because I've given a couple of speeches. I am always critiquing my speeches as many times as I talk, I go back and I check over what I've done to get better about what I do. If you think that you can stop learning, you are about to be obsolete.

Those people who are the most successful are the ones who realize that no matter how much I know there is still more than I need to learn.